

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, November 4, 1998

Aquarium Called in to Assist in Harbor Seal Rescue Attempt



This Harbor seal crawled up on Duxbury Beach.

Photo by Deni Johnson

Harbormaster Don Beers has become accustomed to the late fall influx of harbor seals, so when a "beached" pup is reported as it was last Thursday, certain familiar protocol is followed.

"We give them one free day on the beach 'without a permit', he joked, "but seriously, we put signs up warning people not to bother them."

More often than not he said, seals are resting. "Maybe they've been hunting for fish or just come down from Maine or Canada. We observe them for a day, and if they're still there, we call for assistance figuring they're sick or dying," he said.

Last Thursday Aquarium officials were called down because the seal was first observed by neighbors Wednesday night on the beach near Ocean Rd. South near the north end of Blakeman's parking lot by the sea wall.

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After several hours of observing the mammal, Animal Control Officer Halley Dee Parlin and N.E. Aquarium animal technicians attempted to load the seal on plywood into a cage for transportation back to the Aquarium. The seal died in the cage before reaching the Aquarium.

On Monday, N.E. Aquarium Animal Technician Kristen Patchett said that preliminary tests on the seal indicated that probable cause of death was pneumonia and lungworm. She said the seal appeared to be a juvenile, although histology reports were not back yet. She said it was not uncommon for the seal to beach itself when sick.

"Normally a seal pup will stay with its mother for about three or four weeks and then it's on its own to figure out how to hunt. It's not abnormal in the animal kingdom to see this happen. About 50 percent die.

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Sometimes they come in contact with parasites and if they're in a weakened condition can contract other infections.

Patchett said that many seals are coming south from Maine this time of year to the warmer waters of coastal harbor areas.

Duxbury has reported visits from harbor seals, gray seals, hooded seals, and harp seals, she said.

"It is very important that people understand they should never approach a seal or touch them. Always keep a safe distance and be sure it doesn't get stressed. It can give you a nasty bite."

Beers said he often sees seals flipping up on the floats in front of the harbormaster's office, at Bug Light, or on Gurnet Point. "

Said Beers, "We don't hassle them. This is really their front yard. We don't bother them unless they need help."



The baby seal lays helpless on Duxbury Beach as his fate is determined by a group of experts.



Duxbury resident Heather Kennedy discovered the seal and protected him by standing guard for hours. Here she and an animal control officer open the cage that was used to transport the seal to the aquarium. Unfortunately, the seal did not survive the ordeal.